A · MARRIAGE · CYCLE

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A MARRIAGE CYCLE

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A MARRIAGE CYCLE

BY
ALICE FREEMAN PALMER

WITH A PREFACE BY
GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

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PREFACE

Alice Freeman Palmer died thirteen years ago. That is a long time to deliberate. Throughout it I have been questioning what to do with her verses. Describing them in my *Life* of her, I said they were too intimate for publication. But time and circumstance change judgments. To destroy the sacred papers, as she commanded, my hand will never move. If left till my death, they will be pretty sure to find their way into fragmentary and disordered print. To me it belongs to fix their final form. If she is ever again to speak in public, I must be present with attending care.

In gradually coming to a decision on this perplexing matter I have been much assisted by a kind of jury. Through a series of years the question of printing has been referred to four college presidents, four novelists, four poets, all persons of standing and social experience, half having no acquaintance with Mrs. Palmer. These, with a group of my most sensitive friends, have read the manuscript entire. On the whole company has been impressed my desire for objection rather than approval. With but two possible exceptions all

have advised publication, the late C. E. Norton — than whom no one could be more scrupulous of good taste or good literature — being especially urgent. They have argued that there is too much beauty here, too just and important an understanding of wedded love, too profound an exhibit of a woman already a kind of national figure, to permit the book to be treated as a private possession. Following their judgment — and my own — rather than my still reluctant feeling, I now print this record of a beautiful soul. About the circumstances in the composition of the poems little can be known. What I know and what I have done I here set down.

On the last anniversary of our wedding, December 23, 1901, Mrs. Palmer brought me a small volume of poems illustrated with photographs of Boxford scenery. Finding them as beautiful and accurate as they were tender, I asked if she were in the habit of writing verse. She said she had never attempted it until a few years before. At that time she was feeling peculiarly the significance of marriage, blended as it always was in her mind with religious experience and the enjoyment of nature. Poetry, she said, had then seemed a natural mode of expression. She had dreamed of recording in it the steps through which two glad souls become one, and through one another united

to God and the world. But time and power failed for the projected *Marriage Cycle*, and she could bring me only unimportant fragments.

Several times in the following year I returned to the subject, venturing praise of what was already accomplished and suggesting further effort; but I got meagre and uninterested replies. In the next summer vacation, however, she told me she had special work at a certain desk, to which I must never go; and when occasionally in those restful months I saw her sitting before that desk, I fancied her poetic scheme was advancing. But she said nothing. In that expressive nature there were ever depths of reserve.

Accordingly I knew no more until her death in Paris, December 6, 1902. The day we parted she said: "In that cabinet you will find a roll of papers. Burn them. They are unfinished poems of mine, merely sketches. For our coming wedding day I hoped to complete my *Marriage Cycle*, but now —" I brought them back with her ashes to America. When I could find eyes to read them I perceived the truth and error of her words. The *Cycle* was indeed unfinished. No poem had a title. Stanzas were begun and not ended. There were lines in which she had shut up and preserved a thought, leaving its metrical form for a cooler moment. Worse still, there were superior and

inferior portions; the latter evidently first drafts, awaiting revision. Yet not all was thus incomplete. A certain number of poems appeared to reach a good degree of technical merit. Desiring to test my estimate, I printed nine of the least personal. They were received with wide, grateful, and critical approval. Subsequently I included a few more in her published *Life*.

The reception of these selected groups convinced me it would be wrong to accept Mrs. Palmer's decision and destroy writings at once so interpretative of marriage and so characteristic of herself. Yet remembering the delicate finish which usually distinguished her work, I was pained to preserve papers of hers in so ragged a condition. Could I myself accomplish the final revision which fate had denied her? I attempted it. But besides a sense of sacrilege in laying hands on something not my own, I learned anew — what I had surmised before — that nature had denied me, a critic, constructive power in verse. My lines were forced and clumsy, jarring the neighborhood of her happy ease. Whatever, therefore, among her poems was unfinished must, I now saw, be destroyed as she had ordered. I could not fundamentally mend; I could merely edit. About fifty of the poems seemed to deserve such editing. These I have supplied with titles and arranged in three groups; for as I

studied them, their underlying plan became clear. Its clue was given in the phrase, "A Marriage Cycle," by which she had twice described them. She wished to mark the successive steps through which home-forming love passes from fascinated timidity, through joyous companionship, to a trust which can defy assault and perplexity. Marriage she always profoundly honored. She believed it essential for every strong life. In her own she had gained and given exceeding happiness, which at last pressed for utterance.

Yet while I feel compelled to set in order what I found, I am sorry to present so defective a picture of a radiant and bounteous nature. These verses are introspective over-much, over-much I mean for representing her adequately. She thought little about herself, largely about girls and women, public and business affairs, the poor, the sick, the quarrelsome, the organization of college studies, the best persons to fill places, her multitude of friends, and all the glory of earth and sky. Few persons are so widely sympathetic. Yet of all these eager interests none has left its impress on her verse except the last. Nor does her buoyancy show, as it should, her bohemianism and perpetual humor. She was often a careless gipsy. Her touch was light, her glance swift, her laughter hearty. These poems give undue emphasis to her serious

and reflective sides. They are private and confessional writings, intended for my eye alone. We catch her here in her rare moments of rest, consciously assessing the worth of what she ordinarily only accepted and enjoyed. Then too her longest periods of leisure came in two severe illnesses, greatly prized by her as opportunities for quiet, for study, and for writing. There are poems here from both. But what she was in her cheerful, unreflecting, care-filled days, when she was brightening the existence of every one near her, one will not discover here.

The veracity of these poems is so convincing that one might easily suppose them to be bare records of events. But they are more than that. In all she did, and in spite of her marvelous spontaneity, Mrs. Palmer was ever a skillful artist, studious of congruities, accords, and seemliness. This appears in her poems, where she often isolates a bit of experience, supplies it with whatever will heighten it, strips it of whatever is accidental, and dares to express it as if it represented an actual and complete occurrence. Many of her papers were dated, but I soon discovered that the dates had little relation to the themes treated. A poem speaks of me as absent when her diary shows me present. Portions of events which occurred at different times are often united by some tie of inner harmony. In

short, the ideal continually shapes the real. The feelings displayed, profoundly genuine as they are, are not mere feelings felt, but feelings recollected and purified. All these poems were written after she had passed her fortieth year, but deal imaginatively with much that was already long gone by.

From childhood she was fond of verse, and her acquaintance with the long line of English poets became extensive and minute. She was familiar with much of the earlier poetry which is now seldom read. It was interesting to see her hospitable yet sure judgment discriminate the good from the middling in authors with whom she was just becoming acquainted. Seldom was she misled by hazy thought or dazzling language. While not insensitive to delicate diction, she sought poetry for the most part in psychological situations rather than in phrases, and counted him the best poet who showed her those situations most accurately.

Her own poems, I think, express this austerer side of her taste. As I try to judge them coolly, I believe their distinctive merit is in their truthfulness, their fresh vision, their freedom from anything like literary sophistication. That disposition to embroider the phrase which has become dominant in the verse of to-day, through the influence of Keats, Rossetti, Tennyson, and Swinburne, is altogether absent. These poems are

strangely direct, with no padding or curiousness. Felicity of phrase is not sought. The expression never draws attention away from the matter. One gets the impression that the thought must have been uttered just so; and this effect of inevitableness is heightened by the swiftness of the lines, which are of unimpeded flow and sing in the ear when ended. Yet the poets she read most during the years when these poems were written were chiefly of a contrasted type — Shakspere in his *Sonnets*, Herbert in his *Temple*, Vaughan in his mystical nature pieces, Mrs. Browning in her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Milton and Donne and Patmore and Tennyson and Browning everywhere. These men have left no marks on her style. Fortunately she loved also the gay Elizabethan lyrists, with Wordsworth too, and Arnold and Barnes and him of the Dimbovitza, and, in early years, the hymn-writer Faber. Whittier's religious verse she counted sacred and with himself was on terms of intimate friendship. Possibly from these lucid writers she may have had help in forming her style. But why seek the influences which fashioned a nature so slightly imitative? In verse, as in all else, Mrs. Palmer created her own methods, having almost a genius for imparting to others her ardent and generous feelings. Something of that genius appears in these poems. If not great, they

possess, I believe, a dignity, naturalness, and appealing power unlike anything else. Her friends will prize them because here they will once more find Mrs. Palmer engaged in her magical art of transmuting our usual and necessary experiences into occasions of wonder, romance, and gladness.

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER.

BOXFORD,
July 16, 1915.

THE APPROACH

THE BIRTH-DAY

The day he stood before my door,
The sunlight playing on his brow,
Upon his face I saw such power
As I had never known till now.
Into my eyes he looked that day.
My heart leaped up; I gave my hand;
But found no words my lips could say
That he might understand.

We wandered by a woodland stream,
And all our talk ran fresh and free
That happy day. Yet in a dream
The woods and fields I could not see.
I heard the brook beside me run,
I saw far off a mountain shine,
I felt the good warmth of the sun —
Ah, day that made the world divine!

FORBIDDEN

I TOLD him not to come
To meet and bring me home.
But yet, as the long day
Wore empty, dull, away,
Though I had sternly said him Nay,
I feared, half hoped, that he would disobey.

"He will not come," I said it o'er and o'er;
He knows I do not wish it. Nay, even more,
I shall be angry if he comes to-night.
He is not here; how glad I am! How right!
But who stands smiling in that sudden light?
Or do my happy tears make dim my sight?

HESITATION

Ah, June, what hast thou brought me?
Great June, what hast thou taught me?
(Still, still, my heart!
Here we two part.)

We walked through meadows,
Under cloud-shadows,
Past college towers,
In golden hours,
Finding June flowers,
Singing over and over,
"First daisies and clover!"
(Rest, my heart, rest!
Old ways of life are best.)

Wait, wait, dark river,
Flowing forever!
Not far is the sea
Where you soon must be.
Wait here beneath the trees,
Fanned by the soft night breeze.

Hear how his tender words
Sing in the dark like birds.
See how the stars look down
As he bends low to crown
My forehead and my hair, —
A crown no queen may wear!
(No, no, my heart!
Tears must not start.)

THE HEALING POOL

Ah, how good
Is the heart of the wood!
Here to lie,
Great clouds sailing by!
From the world's restless mood
Free at last in the deep solitude!
While only the birds are awake,
And no breeze moves the still woodland lake.
As it lies in its broad silence sleeping,
The green hills their faithful watch keeping.

Smooth lake, fold me in to your breast,
In your arms let me rest!
Let me find where your lily-buds grow,
How they come to be whiter than snow;
Your life-giving touch let me feel;
Your secret of peace, oh, reveal
To my hungry and feverish soul,
Till your gladness and calm make me whole.

Fresh and strong from your arms I arise
As if God himself touched my eyes,
And I saw all things new, and again
Were free from life's fever and pain.
Can it be that the angels still lead
To this great pool of healing in need,
With only the sun and the bird
To tell when its waters are stirred?

THE SURRENDER

O LITTLE green leaves,
  You tremble so!
You glitter and shine
  When soft winds blow,
When the sun rides high
In the blue June sky.

But little green leaves
  You haunt my dreams,
  You and laughing streams
Running swift through my sleep.
  You call in my breast,
  You break my rest.

For my heart is awake,
  And it trembles so!
But with gladder amaze
  Than the green leaves know.
For he whom all praise
  Has made love grow.

So, like little green leaves
On a mountain side,
Like a bubbling spring
That cannot bide,
I tremble and sing,
The world is so wide.

For my heart is in Spring
And he is its sun.
He is lord of my world,
And new life has begun.
Take the sceptre, my king!
All I am you have won.

THE SINGING HEART

I WONDER why I am so glad to-day!
My friends have gone away —
Some to the country, some to the salt sea,
Some to the mountains, —
All are gone from me.
And some are sick and some are very sad,
And yet I am so glad!

Why should I feel so glad and well and strong?
Sickness has left me weak, and pain for long
Has kept me silent, constant company.
But now my heart is singing joyously;
No task would be too heavy, no pain bad
To-day, I am so glad!

Why is the world so sweet and fair just now?
Men stagger to their work with aching brow,
The little children gasp in the foul street,
The great tired city throbs with parching heat;
Yet I can drink cool winds from far away,
I am so glad to-day!

Can I be lonely, sick, or sad again?
I will go out to heal my brother's pain,
To help and succor in the world's distress;
So blest, great Love, by thee, I too will bless,
And in dark days to come will think alway
How glad I was to-day!

THE PICTURE

Beloved eyes, beloved eyes!
Light of clear skies!
How steady and serene
Their lifted gaze
Comes from this pictured face,
Full of all manly grace!
So has it ever been
When with a light divine
These eyes smiled into mine.

Ah, beautiful and true
Brow, eyes, and lips of you!
I bend to touch your hair,
But leave a kiss and prayer.
I gaze and gaze again,
And ease my heart of pain.
O dearest, not in vain
The struggles of past years,
The bitter cost of tears!

Deep eyes, great heart,
Immortal joy thou art.
These eyes see all things new,
These lips speak ever true.
In this strong face there grew
And triumphed noble love,
And living faith to move
Mountains from out the way
Of feet that, stumbling, stray.

I lay this cheek on mine
And all myself resign,
Remembering other days
When, walking separate ways,
We still sought God to praise.
To-day with hearts aglow,
Yet hushed, we surely know
These ways of God are best
In which, each lost in each, we find our happy rest.

MEETING

One day we gave each other, one more day.
In the hot city streets we found a way
To meet, and listen to the roar and din,
And know we two sat safely folded in.

The poets brought us their grave, chastening word,
Brought murmurs of the river, breeze and bird;
Till a strange gladness rested in the heart,
Of all our coming years to be a part.

And he had changed. Through days of absence still
More masterful and tender; steady will
Ruled all his face, and love looked through his eyes,
And noble speech grew freer and more wise.

Oh, more than conqueror he seemed that day!
He stood beside me, turned, and went away.
Then I knelt down, and for his sake I prayed
To meet our future glad and unafraid.

PARTING

Dear Love, it was so hard to say
Good bye to-day!
You turned to go, yet going turned to stay!
Till suddenly at last you went away.

Then all at last I found my love unsaid,
And bowed my head;
And went in tears up to my lonely bed.
Oh, would it be like this if you were dead?

THE DRESS

This is the dress I wore,
  This is the jewel too.
Let me put them on again,
  Thinking of you.

You liked the dress, you said.
  Here on the sleeve
You laid a light caress.
  Can you believe

The little dress will ever
  That touch let go?
The jewel cease to mirror
  Two eyes I know?

So I put them on again
  First since that day
When you bent and said Good bye,
  And went away.

THE PATIENCE OF HOPE

Again to-night I saw the thin young moon.
And shall I ask of her a blessed boon?
Come soon, my Love, come soon!

The west was brilliant with the sunset glow.
How often have we stood and watched it so!
We know, dear heart, we know.

Oh, but the world is wonderful and fair,
And it is hard to miss you anywhere.
Not here, my own, nor there.

I want you in this summer night's low noise,
And when the day cries with tumultuous voice
Rejoice, glad soul, rejoice!

But we can walk apart our separate ways,
And will not even ask our Day of Days,
But only sing and praise.
Ah yes! Give constant praise.

BEFORE THE WEDDING

"The shining heights are calling, dear.
The sky is blue, the air is clear
Where the steep mountains rise afar
And all the beckoning angels are.
There we will climb together, gay;
The road winds uphill all the way."

"But it is good here, — Is't not so? —
Here where the opening lilies blow;
Here in the valley, safe from harm,
Here bound by love's still sheltered charm;
Here where the golden fruit hangs near,
Here where your eyes bend close and clear."

"Nay, come! Fear cannot reach our heart.
We know we shall not walk apart.
On to the heights together we
Will follow Love wherever he
May lead us, knowing only this, —
Service and joy we cannot miss."

THE WEDDING SONG

My radiant great day,
How beautiful thou art!
How dost thou fill my heart!
Darkness has passed away.

The earth shines like a star,
The sky is heaven's own blue.
Thou hast made all things new,
Thou, in whose hands we are.

New earth and a new heaven,
New sunshine after rain,
New peace, new joy, new gain —
New life to us is given.

TOGETHER

BOXFORD

Out of the roar and din,
  Safely shut in.
Out of the seething street,
  Silence to meet.

Out of the hurrying hours,
  To lie in flowers;
Far from the toil and strife
  To find our life.

Ah, let the world forget!
  Here we have met.
Most in this sacred place
  I see thy face.

ATTAINMENT

THE perfect summer day is at its height,
And at its height this hushed and restful time.
The fair full moon will rule the heaven to-night;
And our great love has triumphed in its prime.

Perfect the day, the night, the week, the year.
Nature stands smiling, not a cloud on high,
And sees a perfect love that casts out fear
Facing the future without wish or cry.

Great love has triumphed. At a crisis hour
Of strength and struggle on the heights of life
He came, and bidding me abandon power,
Called me to take the quiet name of wife.

My God, I thank thee for a home so fair,
Full of all beauty, peace, and mystery;
But most of all, for him who led me there
Through utmost sacrifice, and so to thee.

THE BUTTERFLY

I HOLD you at last in my hand,
  Exquisite child of the air.
Can I ever understand
  How you grew to be so fair?

You came to my linden tree
  To taste its delicious sweet,
I sitting here in the shadow and shine
  Playing around its feet.

Now I hold you fast in my hand,
  You marvelous butterfly,
Till you help me to understand
  The eternal mystery.

From that creeping thing in the dust
  To this shining bliss in the blue!
God give me courage to trust
  I can break my chrysalis too!

THE PRESENT HEAVEN

I LIE and watch the great white clouds drift by.
As far above the earth as Heaven is high.
"How far is Heaven?" I cry.

"As far as east is from the west, so far
Hath he removed" — Can any sun or star
Measure that space afar?

But I know well that Heaven is near to-day,
And all the world is fair and fresh as May.
My heart 's a child at play.

For love floods all my life, like a great sea.
Dear God, does Heaven hold more than this for me,
Peace deeper, joy more free?

A SONG

A THOUSAND birds are mad with joy,
  The apple trees are white,
The little brook runs like a rollicking boy
  At play with the shadows and light.
The trees of the field clap their hands with bliss
As they tremble and shine in the sun's hot kiss.

We two on the green hillside
  Sit through the still afternoon.
Was ever our love so deep and wide?
  Did the sun ever set so soon?
And yet we welcome the oncoming night,
Bringing with darkness still deeper delight.

BEFORE THE MOWING

Never a sunny morning
Fuller of bliss.
Never gladder faces
Felt the sun's warm kiss
Than my meadow blossoms,
Dreaming not of this.

Wild roses beckoned
All along the Run;
Hardhack and meadow-rue
Sang, "The night is done!"
All the grasses waved their hands
And welcomed back the sun.

Daisies and clovers
Nestled side by side;
Buttercups and black-eyed Susans
Tossed their heads in pride;
And a tall field lily
Looked at me and sighed.

Ah! my meadow grasses,
How your breath is sweet!
How you shelter happy homes
Safe around your feet!
How you shine, relentless death
Suddenly to meet!

SUMMER RAIN

Stand with me here,
My very dear!
Watch the swift armies of the summer rain
Sweep the tall grasses of the Park,
Changing our shining noonday into dark.
Hear the loud thunder roar, again, again,
And roll and triumph in the summer rain.

The little birds all hide,
The cattle, wandering wide,
Seek the safe shelter of a spreading tree.
The old dog crouches by his master's feet.
Dark clouds come on, an army strong and fleet.
Crash follows crash, all things to covert flee;
And wind and lightning drive me — close to thee.

SUNSET

I saw the round flat sun to-night
Sink slowly to the west,
A shining disc of light.
In crimson, purple, gold,
The languid clouds unrolled
And made his coming blest.
The gates of glory lifted up their head
And welcomed him as to a bridal bed,
While all the green world smiled his face to see;
But he looked only on my love and me.

NIGHTFALL

The dear, long, quiet summer day
Draws to its close.
To the deep woods I steal away
To hear what the sweet thrush will say
In her repose.

Beside the brook the meadow-rue
Stands tall and white.
The water softly slips along,
A murmur to the thrush's song,
To greet the night.

Over and over, like a bell,
Her song rings clear;
The trees stand still in joy and prayer,
Only the angels stir the air,
High heaven bends near.

I bow my head, and lift my heart
In thy great peace;
Thy Angelus, my God, I heed,
By the still waters wilt thou lead
Till days shall cease.

THE GLORY OF THE WORLD

O SUMMER night beside the soundless sea,
O golden hour for my dear Love and me!
The past, the future, are at one in thee!

Before us is the moonrise full and bright,
Its pathway on the waves is radiant light;
Behind, the sunset fading into night.

O witching world, with beauty never guessed!
Light of the east, dead splendors of the west,
I lock you fast forever in my breast.

I know your wondrous meaning; for one stands
Beside me, at the touch of whose dear hands
My whole heart leaps to life and understands.

A SPRING JOURNEY

We journeyed through broad woodland ways,
My Love and I.
The maples set the shining fields ablaze.
The blue May sky
Brought to us its great Spring surprise;
While we saw all things through each other's eyes.

And sometimes from a steep hillside
Shone fair and bright
The shadbush, like a young June bride,
Fresh clothed in white.
Sometimes came glimpses glad of the blue sea;
But I smiled only on my Love; he smiled on me.

The violets made a field one mass of blue —
Even bluer than the sky;
The little brook took on that color too,
And sang more merrily.
"Your dress is blue," he laughing said. "Your eyes,"
My heart sang, "sweeter than the bending skies."

We spoke of poets dead so long ago,
And their wise words;
We glanced at apple trees, like drifted snow;
We watched the nesting birds, —
Only a moment! Ah, how short the day!
Yet all the winters cannot blow its sweetness
quite away.

MYSELF

Oh, to be alone!
To escape from the work, the play,
The talking every day!
To escape from all I have done
And all that remains to do!
To escape, — yes, even from you,
My only Love, — and be
Alone and free!

Could I only stand
Beneath pale moon and gray sky,
Where the winds and the sea-gulls cry,
And no man is at hand,
And feel the free air blow
On my rain-wet face, and know
I am free, — not yours, but my own, —
Free and alone!

For the soft firelight
And the home of your heart, my dear,

They hurt, being always here.
I want to stand upright
And to cool my eyes in the air,
And to see how my back can bear
Burdens, — to try, to know,
To learn, to grow.

I am only you.
I am yours, part of you, your wife,
And I have no other life.
I cannot think, cannot do;
I cannot breathe, cannot see;
There is "us," but there is not "me."
And worst, at your touch I grow
Contented so!

THE OPPORTUNITY MISSED

I SIT, beloved, here alone,
Setting my stitches one by one,
Glad that a woman's needle takes
The golden thread when her heart aches.

My shining silk flies fast to-night;
The growing flowers catch the light,
And smile and glow as if they knew
How every touch brings thoughts of you.

All day I felt you very near;
Your step, your voice, was in my ear.
And when at last I heard you call,
The hungry tears would rise and fall.

I meant to be so brave and strong,
And change your burden into song;
But yet, — but yet — you went away
With all unsaid I longed to say.

Forgive my restless, beating heart,
My trembling hands, my unskilled art;
And let me hope, dear one, I may
Be calm, glad, unreserved some day.

IN THE VALLEY

Yea, when he leadeth me, —
And he does lead —
Each valley of the shadow
Turns to flowery mead.
He feedeth me in pastures green,
And all the waters are serene.

From each valley of the shadow
I still lift my eyes
To the mountains roundabout,
And the glad sunrise.
My help cometh sure and soon;
Shadows change to shining noon.

In each valley, through each shadow,
One walks all the way
Close beside me, strong and steady;
In his eyes my day
Brightens out of darkest night.
Love gives all my life its light.

A DREAM

All night the wind blew through my hair,
All night I felt the salt sea air
On lips and cheek.
I flew as the swift swallows fly,
I reached my hands out with a cry
Your hand to seek.

Then side by side we sped along.
How blue the sea, how shrill the song
The wind made in the grass!
How dark the cedars on the hill,
How tall that far-off spire, how still
The graves we passed!

Ah, if indeed we two might ride
Always together, side by side,
In silence and content,
The night would be as bright as day,
I should be rested, brave, and gay,
Whatever way we went.

DAYS AND YEARS

Was it yesterday, my dear,
That your voice was in my ear,
Steady, comforting, and clear?

Only twenty-four short hours?
Did we sit among the flowers?
Has Paradise itself such bowers?

Were we resting side by side?
Look now in my eyes, my shining-eyed!
Ah, God! The world is wide.

THE TIES OF SEPARATION

We say few words when we sit together,
Hands locked in hands and shining eyes.
We write few verses in sunny weather,
When earth laughs back to glittering skies.

But when the clouds are heavy above us,
And miles stretch wide while we sit alone;
Our hearts cry aloud to hearts that love us,
And pain sobs out its long undertone.

If we never were parted nor grew so tired,
Never were shut from touch or speech,
Our poets would stand dumb, uninspired,
And God's best gifts be out of reach.

So we bless his wisdom in giving and taking,
And we sing although clouds hide the sun;
We bring our thirst to his fountain for slaking:
Through doing his will our will too is done.

THE POETS

These are the poems he loves,
  These are the books he has read;
I turn them over and over,
  I lay them under my head.

Poems of love and of sorrow,
  Of hope, of parting, of pain,
But of love that knew no measure;
  I read them again and again.

Ah dear, if I were a poet,
  I would show you a woman's heart;
And you should be king in a country
  Where lovers never can part.

HALLOWED PLACES

I PASS my days among the quiet places
Made sacred by your feet.
The air is cool in the fresh woodland spaces,
The meadows very sweet.

The sunset fills the wide sky with its splendor,
The glad birds greet the night;
I stop and listen for a voice strong, tender,
I wait those dear eyes' light.

You are the heart of every gleam of glory,
Your presence fills the air,
About you gathers all the fair year's story;
I read you everywhere.

HOARDED GOLD

Just as a miser hoards and counts his gold,
So I my treasures, full of bliss untold.
I think their touch would thaw away death's cold.

This fern-leaf grew in a deserted place
Where once a house stood. For a little space
He held my hand. That is my fount of grace.

These withered leaves — just two — were in the wood
Where we two in the mist and rain still stood
And unclasped hands to go. But God is good.

These dry sweet bay leaves grew beside the sea.
I keep their fragrant breath ever with me
Because one day we were so glad and free.

He smiled to see this wild rose in my dress.
That smile was like a yearning brief caress.
So all wild roses to my lips I press.

Here is a clover blossom, faded red.
It grew among the grasses at his head
While on the river bank he lay and read.

A piece of laurel? How the mountains rise!
How stern the landscape and how wild the skies!
Bend down, my hero! Let me see your eyes!

Through the dim woods we rode one summer day;
He kissed me softly there beside the spray
Where grew this golden flower I keep alway.

Dear flowers, you have my sacred story told.
I never can grow weary, poor, or old.
Richer than all the misers with their gold!

UNTROUBLED

By the river
Hurrying ever,
We walk peaceful while the waters roar and hiss.
Our low voices
Still earth's noises;
Heaven is this.

In my verses
Love rehearses
All the changes as the day draws to its close.
The dim twilight
Turns to starlight;
So love glows.

In the splendor,
Deep and tender,
Flooding the wide glory of the west,
Hushed I meet you,
Touch and greet you,
O my best!

DECEMBER

Only half a year ago, Love,
  Did we pass this way?
Now the ground is white with snowdrifts,
  Chill the clouds and gray.

Then the river wandered softly
  Onward to the sea;
All the green world sang in chorus
  Just for you and me.

Full of light and sound and fragrance,
  Night shone more than day;
Till we held our breaths in rapture,
  And in silence lay.

Now the earth is cold and lifeless
  All the trees are bare;
Only now and then a snowflake
  Wanders through the air.

But your hand sweeps all my heartstrings
To a joyful tune;
In the world it may be winter,
In my life 't is June.

So in meeting or in parting,
Winter time or Spring,
You still fill my life with beauty,
Teach my days to sing.

A COMMUNION HYMN

How sweet and silent is the place,
My God, alone with thee!
Awaiting here thy touch of grace,
Thy heavenly mystery.

So many ways thou hast, dear Lord,
My longing heart to fill:
Thy lovely world, thy spoken word,
The doing thy sweet will.

Giving thy children living bread,
Leading thy weak ones on,
The touch of dear hands on my head,
The thought of loved ones gone.

Lead me by many paths, dear Lord,
But always in thy way,
And let me make my earth a Heaven
Till next Communion Day.

THE PARTING

RESTING

To-night I was so tired, dear.
Then you sat down beside me here;
In the still, fragrant dusk you took my hand.
We found no words to speak,
But rested cheek on cheek,
In the deep peace two hearts can understand.

The week had been too long;
Its duties, swift and strong,
Swept through the days and nights, — and you away.
With you, life's tide came in;
The loud world's strife and din
Hushed quickly, and my heart grew strong and gay.

Violets and roses red
Breathed sweetness near your head;
But sweeter, nearer, eyes and hands of you!
So I rose comforted,
Spirit serene, full-fed,
Fitted again for work I still must do.

SUFFOCATION

I CANNOT bear your violin to-night,
    It sobs and wails with pain.
Down the piano-keys the tears drop light.
    Put out the lamps again.

Some moments come when poetry and song
    Are far too sad for me;
When music's chords beat on my heart too strong,
    I cannot breathe or see.

Let me go out under the steadfast stars,
    So many and so still,
And soothe my spirit beating on its bars,
    And think on Heaven's high will.

Night unto night, dear God, thy glory tells,
    Thy stars together sing;
Such music all my heart with rapture swells,
    As black buds swell in Spring.

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GRIEF

I said to Pain, "I will not have thee here!
The nights are weary and the days are drear
In thy hard company."
He clasped me close and held me still so long
I learned how deep his voice, how sweet his song,
How far his eyes can see.

COMPANIONSHIP

In the long watches of the summer night
I do not wake alone.
In the dark silence and the strange moonlight
I will not cry or moan.
I will lie still beneath the fire of pain;
All the long torture shall not be in vain.

One watches here beside me where I lie
And long for the sunrise.
The chair is empty, and no form is nigh;
Unseen by other eyes,
Yet with the touch of healing in his hands,
And tender smile, love waits and understands.

I will not shrink away nor dread the knife,
But gladly bear my part.
Love is, and ever shall be, lord of life;
Love rules my happy heart.
Pain vanishes, and death is vanquished still;
Since love and life are one, how can death kill?

THE VISION

Dear Love, you came to me in dreams last night;
In the still darkness suddenly a light!
And when I swept away the tears to see,
The light was your calm face, smiling on me.

"Dear, are you resting?" tenderly you said,
"And are you happy?" When I turned my head,
You saw the tears, and to me quickly stepped,
Knelt, laid your face by mine; and then I slept.

THE TEMPEST

"He shall give his angels charge
Over thee in all thy ways."
Though the thunders roam at large,
Though the lightning round me plays,
Like a child I lay my head
In sweet sleep upon my bed.

Though the terror come so close,
It shall have no power to smite;
It shall deepen my repose,
Turn the darkness into light.
Touch of angels' hands is sweet;
Not a stone shall hurt my feet.

All thy waves and billows go
Over me to press me down
Into arms so strong I know
They will never let me drown.
Ah, my God, how good thy will!
I will nestle and be still.

THE CRISIS

Out of the depths, O Lord,
  Out of the grasp of pain,
According to thy word,
  Thou raisest me again.

Even as my day, my strength!
  From sharpest agony
Thou givest calm at length.
  What must thy Heaven be?

Oh may I, when my breath
  Fails, and death's last alarms
Confuse, find underneath
  The everlasting arms!

ON A GLOOMY EASTER

I HEAR the robins singing in the rain.
The longed-for Spring is hushed so drearily
That hungry lips cry often wearily,
"Oh, if the blessed sun would shine again!"

I hear the robins singing in the rain.
The misty world lies waiting for the dawn;
The wind sobs at my window and is gone,
And in the silence come old throbs of pain.

But still the robins sing on in the rain,
Not waiting for the morning sun to break,
Nor listening for the violets to wake,
Nor fearing lest the snow may fall again.

My heart sings with the robins in the rain,
For I remember it is Easter morn,
And life and love and peace are all new born,
And joy has triumphed over loss and pain.

Sing on, brave robins, sing on in the rain!
You know behind the clouds the sun must shine,
You know that death means only life divine
And all our losses turn to heavenly gain.

I lie and listen to you in the rain.
Better than Easter bells that do not cease,
Your message from the heart of God's great peace,
And to his arms I turn and sleep again.

THE CURE

Ah, yes! Now I can sleep,
And all is going well.
I've seen his eyes; they keep
Their old-time magic spell.

Take medicines away,
And raise the curtain too!
How glorious the day!
And oh the sky, how blue!

I hear a little lass
Laugh out down in the street.
How many people pass!
How merry sound their feet!

This is a sacred day,
The far-off hills I see;
I smell the fresh-cut hay;
I hear the river's glee.

My hand in his hand lies.
  How safe I feel and strong!
A mist is in my eyes,
  My heart is full of song.

ASSURANCE

To-day he took me in his arms again,
  Caressingly, caressingly.
Into a sea of peace was swept my pain
  So suddenly, oh suddenly!
He held me close; his hand lay on my head;
In that compelling voice I love, he said,
  "Rest here with me, rest here with me."

A little while I leaned against his heart,
  So quietly, oh quietly!
That hour has robbed our parting of its smart,
  In days to be, long days to be.
Oceans are far too small to separate,
Nor life nor death, nor height nor depth nor fate,
  My Love from me, dear Love from me.

THE LAST ANNIVERSARY

Fifteen years ago, dear,
Fifteen years to-day!
Let us walk our fields together
While we may.

Shall we find the roses, dear,
Still beside the Run,
As that morning when beside them
Life begun?

Will the brook sing on, dear,
The same song to-night
As that evening when our darkness
Turned to light?

One third of my life, dear,
Since I heard you call,
And put by my work and, rising,
Gave you all.

Lay your hand in mine, dear,
Let me hear you say
I have made you gladder always
Since that day!

RETROSPECT

I

Ah, my infinite lover,
Childhood you recover.
Great magician, you!
All you dreamed came true.
Down through fairyland
We went, hand in hand;
By the river of life,
Far from lands of strife,
Through fields of sunny memory
You led me tenderly.
At light of your gray eyes
Clouds fled the skies;
Out of my life one day
Pain vanished away.
(Peace, my heart, peace!
Sorrow now shall cease.)

II

Broader the river grows,
A deeper current flows,
Higher mountains stand
Shadowing our smiling land;
Taller the bare trees climb,
Pointing from earth and time.
Bend down your stately head
Here by the river's bed.
Ere the dark night shuts down
Take, dear, the victor's crown;
Laurel, laurel is thine,
Fresh and fadeless, hero mine.
(Rise, my heart, rise!
Give him the prize.)

III

Mountain heights are cold,
Though laurel-crowned and bold.
Victors' brows can wear
Lonely pain and care.
So, ere we part,
Take my roses' heart.
Sweet their petals, even in death;
Drink deep their fragrant breath.
Laurel and roses both for you,
Hero strong and lover true!
(Sleep, my heart, sleep!
God's love is deep.)

THE END

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